

Documents on Diplomacy: The Source

Banishing War in the Western Hemisphere *Address by Secretary of State Hull in Buenos Aires, December 5, 1936*

The primary purpose of this Conference is to banish war from the Western Hemisphere. In its earnest pursuit of this great undertaking it is necessary at the outset to visualize numerous dangerous conditions and practices in general international affairs to the extent that they bear upon and affect the work of this Conference. It is manifest that every country today is faced with a supreme alternative. Each must play its part in determining whether the world will slip backward toward war and savagery, or whether it can maintain and will advance the level of civilization and peace. None can escape its responsibility.

The twenty-one American republics cannot remain unconcerned by the grave and threatening conditions in many parts of the world. Our convocation here in Buenos Aires utters this hemisphere's common voice of its interest in, nay, its intense concern over, the determination of this momentous question. The repercussions of wars and preparations for wars have been so universally disastrous that it is now as plain as mathematical truth that each nation in any part of the world is concerned in peace in every part of the world. The nations of all the Americas, through their chosen delegates, have assembled to make careful survey and analysis of all aspects of their responsibilities; to take account of their common duties; and to plan accordingly for the safety and welfare of their peoples.

The Western Hemisphere must now face squarely certain hard realities. For the purpose of our undertaking, we must frankly recognize that for some time the forces of militarism have been in the ascendant in a large part of the world; those of peace have been correspondingly on the decline. We should be lacking in common sense if we ignored the plain fact that the effects of these forces will unavoidably have direct impact upon all of us. We should be lacking in ordinary caution if we fail to counsel together for our common safety and welfare.

It is bad enough when many statesmen and peoples close their minds and memories to the awful lesson taught by the millions of soldiers sacrificed in the World War; the shattered cities, the desolated fields, and all the other material, moral, and spiritual ravages of that conflict. Still worse, that war has brought in its train wounds to man's heart and spirit, national hatreds and fears, the dislocation or destruction of indispensable political and

governmental structures, and the collapse or cool abandonment of former high standards of national conduct. The supreme tragedy is completed by the break-down of the commerce of mind and culture, the attempt to isolate the nations of the earth into sealed compartments, all of which have made war a burden not to be endured by mankind.

The delegates of the American nations, meeting here in the face of these grave and threatening world conditions, must realize that mere words will not suffice. From every wise and practical viewpoint, concrete peace planning, peace views, and peace objectives are imperative. We must quicken our words and our hopes into a specific, embracing program to maintain peace. Such a program, adequately implemented, should constitute an armory of peace. It should comprise a structure affording all practical means for safeguarding peace. At a time when many other governments or peoples fail or fear to proclaim and embrace a broad or definite peace plan or movement, while their statesmen are shouting threats of war, it is all the more necessary that we of the Americas must cry out for peace, keep alive the spirit of peace, live by the rules of peace, and forthwith perfect the machinery for its maintenance. Should we fail to make this outstanding contribution, it would be a practical desertion of the cause of peace and a tragic blow to the hopes of humanity.

In meeting this problem, the American republics are in a peculiarly advantageous situation. There are among us no radical differences, no profound mistrusts or deep hatreds. On the contrary we are inspired by the impulse to be constant friends and the determination to be peaceful neighbors.

We recognize the right of all nations to handle their affairs in any way they choose, and this quite irrespective of the fact that their way may be different from our way or even repugnant to our ideas. But we cannot fail to take cognizance of the international aspect of their policies when and to the extent that they may react upon us. I, myself, am unalterably of the view that a policy leading to war may react upon us. In the face of any situation directly leading to war, can we therefore be other than apprehensive?

In sustaining the firm determination that peace must be maintained and that any country whose policies make war likely

is threatening injury to all, I believe that the nations of this hemisphere would find themselves in accord with governments elsewhere. I strongly entertain the hope that a united group of American nations may take common action at this Conference further to assure peace among themselves and define their attitude toward war; and that this action may not only demonstrate the happy position of the New World, but, though designed primarily for our own benefit, embody policies of world application and correspond to the views and interests of nations outside this hemisphere.

There is no need for war. There is a practical alternative policy at hand, complete and adequate. It is no exclusive policy aimed at the safety or supremacy of a few, leaving others to struggle with distressful situations. It demands no sacrifices comparable to the advantages which will result to each nation and to each individual.

In these circumstances the representatives of the twenty-one American republics should frankly call the attention of the people of this hemisphere to the possibilities of danger to their future peace and progress and at the same time set forth the numerous steps that can well be undertaken as the most effective means of improving and safeguarding the conditions of permanent peace.

While carefully avoiding any political entanglements, my government strives at all times to cooperate with other nations to every practical extent in support of peace objectives, including reduction or limitation of armaments, the control of traffic in arms, taking the profits out of war, and the restoration of fair and friendly economic relationships. We reject war as a method of settling international disputes and favor such methods as conference, conciliation, and arbitration.

Peace can be partially safeguarded through international agreements. Such agreements, however, must reflect the utmost good faith; this alone can be the guaranty of their significance and usefulness. Contemporary events clearly show that, where mutual trust, good-will, and sincerity of purpose are lacking, pacts or agreements fail; and the world is seized by fear and left to the mercy of the wreckers.

The Conference has the duty of considering all peace proposals of merit. Let me enumerate and briefly discuss eight separate and vitally important principles and proposals for a comprehensive peace program and peace structure. They are not designed to be all-inclusive. In considering them we should be guided by the knowledge that other forces and agencies of peace exist besides those made and to be made on our continents; what we do contemplates no conflict with sincere efforts the world over.

First. I would emphasize the local and unilateral responsibility of each nation carefully to educate and organize its people in

opposition to war and its underlying causes. Support must be given to peace, to the most effective policies for its preservation; and, finally, each nation must maintain conditions within its own borders which will permit it to adopt national policies that can be peacefully pursued. More than any other factor, a thoroughly informed and alert public opinion in each country as to the suitable and desirable relationships with other nations and the principles underlying them, enables a government in time of crisis to act promptly and effectively for peace.

The forces of peace everywhere are entitled to function both through governments and through public opinion. The peoples of the world would be far wiser if they expended more of their hard-earned money in organizing the forces of peace and fewer of the present five billion dollars in educating and training their military forces.

Since the time when Thomas Jefferson insisted upon a "decent respect to the opinions of mankind", public opinion has controlled foreign policy in all democracies. It is, therefore, all-important that every platform, every pulpit, and every forum should become constant and active agencies in the great work of education and organization. The limited extent of such highly organized and intelligent public opinion in support of peace is by far the largest draw-back to any plan to prevent war. Truly the first step is that each nation must thus make itself safe for peace. This, too, develops a common will for freedom, the soil from which peace springs.

People everywhere should be made to know of the peace mechanisms. Even more, there should be brought home to them the knowledge the trade, commerce, finance, debts, communications, have a bearing on peace. The workman at his bench, the farmer on his land, the shop keeper by his shelves, the clerk at his books, the laborer in factory plantation, mine, or construction camp, must realize that his work is the work of peace; that to interrupt it for ends of national or personal rapacity is to drive him toward quick death by bayonets, or to slower but not less grievous suffering through economic distress.

In all our countries we have scholars who can demonstrate these facts; let them not be silent. Our churches have direct contact with all groups; may they remember that the peacemakers are the children of God. We have artists and poets who can distil their needed knowledge into trenchant phrase and line; they have work to do. Our area journals on both continents cover the world. Our women are awake our youth sentient; our clubs and organizations make opinion every where. There is a strength here available greater than that of armies. We have but to ask its aid; it will be swift to answer, not only here but in continents beyond the seas.

Second. Indispensable in their influence for peace and well-being are frequent conferences between representatives of the

nations and intercourse between their peoples. Collaboration and the exchange of views, ideas, and information are the most effective means of establishing understanding, friendship, and trust. I would again emphasize that any written pacts or agreements not based upon such relationships as these too often exist on paper only. Development of the atmosphere of peace, understanding, and good-will during our sessions here will alone constitute a vast accomplishment.

Third. Any complete program would include safeguarding the nations of this hemisphere from using force, one against the other, through the consummation of all of the five well-known peace agreements, produced in chief part by previous conferences, as well as through the Draft Convention Coordinating the Existing Treaties between the American States and Extending Them in Certain Respects, which the delegation of the United States is presenting for the consideration of this Conference.

In these, virtually all of the essentials of adequate machinery are present. If their operation is somewhat implemented by provisions in the draft proposal I have just mentioned to be considered by this Conference, such machinery would be complete.

The first of these is the *Treaty to Avoid and Prevent Conflicts between the American States*, which was signed in Santiago in 1923.

The second is the *Treaty for the Renunciation of War*, known as the Kellogg-Briand pact, or the Pact of Paris, signed at Paris in 1928.

The third is the *General Convention of Inter-American Conciliation*, signed at Washington in 1929.

The fourth is the *General Treaty of Inter-American Arbitration*, signed at Washington in 1929.

The fifth is the *Anti-War Treaty of Non-Aggression and Conciliation*, signed at Rio de Janeiro in 1933.

While the Montevideo Conference in 1933 went on record of the valid execution of these five agreements by each of the twenty-one governments represented, several have not yet completed this ratification. These agreements provide a many-sided and flexible functioning machinery for the adjustment of difficulties that may arise in this hemisphere. A government could not give more tangible proof of its readiness to translate into practicable form its desire to promote: and to maintain peace. Swift action by all of us to ratify these agreements should be the natural assertion of our intentions.

Fourth. If war should occur, any peace program must provide for the problem then presented. For the belligerent, there is the ruin and suffering of war. For the neutrals, there is the task of remaining neutral, of not being too disturbed in their own

affairs, of not having their own peace imperiled, of working in common to restrict the war and bring it to an end. Can we in this Conference work out for ourselves a common line of policy that might be pursued during a period of neutrality? Some first broad approaches toward that end are, I think, possible. If these are to be sound they must be inspired by the determination to stay at peace. When interests are challenged, when minds are stirred, when entry into war in some particular juncture may appear to offer to some country the chance of national advantage then determination is needed to retain neutrality. The maintenance of neutrality is an achievement to be attained more readily if undertaken jointly. Such agreement would be a tremendous safeguard for each of us. It might be a powerful means of ending war.

When we have done all that seems to be possible in extending and perfecting an integrated and permanent mechanism for preserving peaceful relations among ourselves, and when we have placed in operation these various instruments, the twenty-one republics of this hemisphere will have given overt expression to the most determined will for peace to be found in the world today. In the face of a weakening elsewhere in the world of reliance on an observance of international agreements, we shall have proclaimed our firm intention that these peaceful instruments shall be the foundation of relations between nations throughout this whole region.

If we can endow peace with certainty, if we can make it glow in our part of the world, then we may indulge the hope that our example will not be in vain.

Fifth. The peoples of this region have a further opportunity. They must make headway with a liberal policy of commerce, which would lower excessive barriers to trade and lessen injurious discriminations as between the trade of different countries. This means the substitution of a policy of economic benefit, good-will, and fair-dealing for one stimulated by greedy and short-sighted calculations of monetary advantage in an impractical isolation. It would have most beneficial effects, both direct and indirect, upon political difficulties and antagonisms.

A thriving international commerce, well-adjusted to the resources and talents of each country, brings benefit to all. It keeps men employed, active, and usefully supplying the wants of others. It leads each country to look upon others as helpful counterparts to itself rather than as antagonists. It opens up to each country, to the extent mutually profitable and desirable, the resources and the organized productive power of other countries; by its benefits small nations with limited territory or resources can have a varied, secure, and prosperous life; it can bring improvement to those who feel their toil too hard and their reward too meager.

Prosperity and peace are not separate entities. To promote one is to promote the other. The economic well-being of peoples is the greatest single protection against civil strife, large armaments, war. Economic isolation and military force go hand in hand; when nations cannot get what they need by the normal processes of trade, they will continue to resort to the use of force. A people employed and in a state of reasonable comfort is not a people among whom class struggles, militarism, and war can thrive. But a people driven to desperation by want and misery is at all times a threat to peace, their conditions an invitation to disorder and chaos, both internal and external. The intervening years have given added significance to the economic program adopted at the Conference at Montevideo three years ago. That program is today the greatest potential force both for peace and prosperity. Our present Conference should reaffirm and secure action upon this program of economic intelligence.

One feature of the resolutions adopted at Montevideo was the support for the principle of equality of treatment as the basis of acceptable commercial policy. This rule has been followed in a number of commercial agreements that have already been concluded between American nations. Their benefits are already becoming manifest and will continue to grow. We cannot blind ourselves to the fact, however, that at the same time there has taken place even among the American nations a growth in the restrictions upon trade and an extension of discriminatory practices; these have tended to counteract the advantages resulting from the liberalizing terms embodied in other agreements.

I would urge again the wisdom of avoiding discrimination in our commercial policy. The practice of discrimination prevents trade from following the lines which would produce the greatest economic benefits; it inevitably, in the long run, provokes retaliation from those who suffer from discrimination, makes it more difficult for countries eager to pursue a liberal trade policy to secure the fair gains from this policy, and thereby checks the lowering of restrictions. It will not serve our broad and deep aims; on the contrary, if steadily extended, it will lead us into new controversies and difficulties. The Montevideo program offers the only alternative to the present short-sighted, war-breeding bilateral bargaining method of trade, to the exclusion of triangular and multilateral trade, which is being employed in many parts of the world with sterile results.

The ends we seek can best be achieved by the concurrent or concerted action of many countries. Each can exert itself steadfastly amidst the particular circumstances of its economic situation to make its contribution toward the rebuilding of trade. Each can grant new opportunities to others as it receives new opportunities for itself. All are called upon to share in the concurrent or concerted action which is required. Any country which seeks the

benefits of the program while avoiding its responsibilities, will in time shut itself off from the benefits. Any country which is tempted or forced by some special calculation to depart from these lines of action and which conveys and seeks special advantage jeopardizes the progress and, perhaps, the very existence of the program. Faithful dealing, with out favor, between equal partners will be required to readjust trade along the lines of growth, which is our goal.

Sixth. The Conference must recognize the all-important principle of practical international cooperation to restore many indispensable relationships between nations, for international relationships, in many vital respects, are at a low ebb. The entire international order is severely dislocated. Chaotic conditions in the relations between nations have appeared. Human progress already has slowed down.

Nations in recent years have sought to live a hermit existence by isolating themselves from each other in suspicion and fear. The inevitable result is not unlike that experienced by a community where individuals undertake to live a hermit existence, with the resultant decline and decay of the spiritual, the moral, the educational, and the material benefits and blessings which spring from community organization and effort. The difference, when nations live apart, is that the entire human race in countless instances suffers irreparable injury-political, moral, material, spiritual, and social. Today, for illustration, through lack of comprehension, understanding, and confidence, we see many nations exhausting their material substance and the vitality of their people by piling up huge armaments. We behold others, in their attempted isolation, becoming more indifferent and less considerate toward the rights, privileges, and honest opinions of others. National character and conduct are threatened with utter demoralization. At no distant time we shall see a state of moral and spiritual isolation, bringing with it the condemnation of the world, covering great parts of the earth, unless peoples halt and turn toward a sane course.

Seventh. International law has been in large measure flouted. It should be reestablished, revitalized, and strengthened by general demand. International law protects the peace and security of nations and so safeguards them against maintaining great armaments and wasting their substance in continual readiness for war. Founded upon justice and humanity, the great principles of international law are the source and fountain of the equality, the security, and the very existence of nations. Armies and navies are no permanent substitute. Abandonment of the rule of law would not only leave small or unarmed states at the mercy of the reckless and powerful but would hopelessly undermine all international order. It is inconceivable that the civilized nations would long delay a supreme effort to reestablish that rule of law.

Eighth. Observance of understandings, agreements, and treaties between nations constitutes the foundation of international order.

May I say here that this is not a time for crimination or recrimination, nor is such in my mind during this discussion. There must be the fullest patience and forbearance, one country with another, as the nations endeavor to climb back to that high ground of wholesome and elevating relationship of loyalty to the given word, of faithful fair-dealing.

International agreements have lost their force and reliability as a basis of relations between nations. This extremely ominous and fateful development constitutes the most dangerous single phenomenon in the world of today; not international law merely, but that which is higher—moral law—and the whole integrity and honor of governments are in danger of being ruthlessly trampled upon. There has been a failure of the spirit. There is no task more urgent than that of remaking the basis of trusted agreement between nations. They must ardently seek the terms of new agreements and stand behind them with unfailing will. The vitality of international agreements must be restored.

If the solemn rights and obligations between nations are to be treated lightly or brushed aside, the nations of the world will head straight toward international anarchy and chaos. And soon, too, the citizen begins to lower his individual standards of personal, moral, and business conduct to those of his government. Trust in each nation's honor and faith in its given word must be restored by the concerted resolve of all governments.

It is to the interest of everyone that there be an end of treaties broken by arbitrary unilateral action. Peaceful procedure,

agreements between the signatories, and mutual understanding must be restored as the means of modifying or ending international agreements.

In the accomplishment of the high aims and purposes of this eightfold program, the people of every nation have an equal interest. We of this hemisphere have reason to hope that these great objectives may receive the support of all peoples. If peace and progress are to be either maintained or advanced, the time is overripe for renewed effort on each nation's part. There can be no delay. Through past centuries, the human race fought its way up from the low level of barbarism and war to that of civilization and peace. This accomplishment has only been partial, and it may well be but temporary.

It would be a frightful commentary on the human race if, with the awful lesson of its disastrous experience, responsible and civilized governments should now fail.

The nations of this continent should omit no word or act in their attempt to meet the dangerous conditions which endanger peace. Let our actions here at Buenos Aires constitute the most potent possible appeal to peacemakers and war-makers throughout the world.

So only does civilization become real. So only can we rightly ask that universal support which entitles governments to speak for their peoples to the world, not with the voice of propaganda but with that of truth. Having affirmed our faith, we should be remiss if we were to leave anything undone which will tend to assure our peace here and make us powerful for peace elsewhere. In a very real sense, let this continent set the high example of championing the forces of peace, democracy, and civilization. ■

Source

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